

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 19, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

We write to you regarding the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) public health response provisions included in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021. As we work to end the public health emergency related to COVID-19, it is critical that we ensure resources and support are made available to the communities that have been hardest hit by this disease and by those most trusted to deliver testing, tracing, vaccination, and outreach and education services.

We applaud the focus of this Administration, and in particular your department, in directing agencies to acknowledge and advance policies tackling the widening health inequities in the United States. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, “achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing efforts to address avoidable inequities and the elimination of health and healthcare disparities.”¹ Data from the CDC continue to show that variations exist among all aspects of the COVID pandemic – from risk of illness, vaccination rates, and access to appropriate care.² However, we also know that cases, hospitalizations and deaths associated with COVID-19 have disproportionately impacted communities of color, making access to testing, treatment, vaccines, and educational resources in these communities even more critical.³

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC COVID-19 Response Health Equity Strategy: Accelerating Progress Towards Reducing COVID-19 Disparities and Achieving Health Equity* (Aug. 2020) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/cdc-strategy.html).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *COVID-19, Racial and Ethnic Disparities* (Dec. 2020) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/increased-risk-illness.html).

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR): Race, Ethnicity, and Age Trends in Persons Who Died from COVID-19 – United States, May -August 2020* (Oct. 23, 2020).

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The provisions enacted through the ARP must reinforce the Administration's commitment to equity and ensure a targeted approach for the COVID-19 response. It is our hope that you will ensure that the grant funding made available for testing, contact tracing, vaccine awareness, outreach, and confidence also include public and nonprofit entities such as community-based and faith-based organizations, as outlined in H.R. 1835, the "COVID Community Care Act" and the "Heroes Act." These entities play a critical role as trusted voices in their communities and can ensure medically underserved and those at high risk for COVID-19 receive the support they need. As authorized in the ARP, we thank you for implementing programs such as the Community-Based Workforce for COVID-19 Vaccine Outreach Program and the Health Center Program administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration. We urge you to continue to develop funding opportunities such as these, which are critical steps towards bringing much needed resources to medically underserved communities by trusted messengers.

We remain committed to collaborate with you on the implementation of these provisions and are grateful for your continued leadership in prioritizing direct community involvement as a key strategy in your programs. If you have any questions, please contact Shana Beavin with the Committee on Energy and Commerce Majority staff at (202) 225-2927 or shana.beavin@mail.house.gov or Erika Ninoyu with Representative Lee's office at (202) 225-2661 or erika.ninoyu@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress